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Culture of peace

Identical letters dated 16 October 2006 from the Permanent Representative of the Philippines to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the General Assembly

I have the honour to respectfully request the circulation of the concluding summary of the high-level Conference on Interfaith Cooperation towards Peace as a document of the sixty-first session of the General Assembly, under agenda item 44 (see annex).

(Signed) Lauro L. Baja, Jr.
Permanent Representative



**Annex to the identical letters dated 16 October 2006 from the
Permanent Representative of the Philippines to the United Nations
addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the
General Assembly**

**HIGH LEVEL CONFERENCE ON INTERFAITH COOPERATION
FOR PEACE***

MODERATOR'S CONCLUDING SUMMARY

Dr. Katherine Marshall
Chief Moderator

Today marked the formal launch of the first major project of the Tripartite Forum on Interfaith Cooperation for Peace, and involved inspirational speeches and wise comments from global and UN leaders and the wide range of participants, from member states, from United Nations agencies, and from many Religious bodies and NGOs. My colleagues as moderators, Sister Joan Kirby and Stein Villumstad, have highlighted some key points. My summary briefly reviews what we have achieved, in the form of a stock-taking, starting from a set of fundamental questions about when, how much, why, where, who, what, and how.

Many thanks to all who devoted extraordinary efforts to bringing this idea to its current stage, and especially the Philippine Government and His Excellency Minister Alberto G. Romulo. We are all grateful for the initiative and hard work, behind and in front of the scenes that made today possible and assured its smooth running. Their work is evidence that they have had this day an initiative close to their hearts.

My thanks to my wonderful co-moderators. They gave brief summaries of their leading conclusions. Sister Joan Kirby highlighted her sense of a deep commitment to action, going beyond dialogue in itself. In sum, the goal of dialogue, whether interfaith or among the agencies represented here, must be geared to action and must be one that entails both giving and receiving. Stein Villumstad emphasized the multiple roles and goals of interfaith dialogue, to promote understanding: between: faiths and different elements of cultures, between faiths and governments, and among religions and multinational institutions. Such dialogue on all fronts is not an option: it is a must.

My sense was that we emerged from this day with strong consensus on a number of fundamental points, and several themes were echoed by all parts of the tripartite group. On several other areas the consensus was less clear and calls us to further work, dialogue and reflection.

**Organized by the Tripartite Forum on Interfaith Cooperation For Peace, United Nations Conference Room 3, September 21, 2006. Other details of the Conference can be gleaned on www.tripartiteinterfaithforum.org.*

Areas of Consensus:

When? There was a strong theme throughout the day's discussion that the initiative to launch the High Level Tripartite Forum initiative is not only timely but urgently needed. Speaker after speaker echoed this sense of a critical moment when action and dialogue are needed.

How Much? Much more, was the common answer to questions about interfaith engagement and action within the United Nations system. There was a sense that there is far too little engagement and understanding and that far more is needed.

Why? In many forms, the speakers today affirmed that current debates and structures involve faith institutions and leaders far too little, yet they are critical to the goals of peace and human security. This gap in understanding and dialogue contributes both to poor understanding of issues involving religion that have enormous global and geopolitical significance and a wide range of missed opportunities to contribute to peace-making and building and to development. The complex intersections of religion and violence were the subject of much reflection, and there were strong voices that highlighted the importance of religious actors in peace building and peace-making, as well as conflict prevention.

The central role of the millennium development goals (MDGs) was stressed as an organizing framework. I was concerned through the first part of the day to hear so little focus on poverty and the MDGs but this came out more strongly in the latter interventions. There was less specific focus on religious institution roles in development but a recognition that this is a central topic that needs much more attention.

There was also a widely shared sense that discussion of underlying values, which is a central concern of religious institutions but also of each and every party present, is sorely needed. Bringing values into United Nations discussions at every level was seen as appropriate and necessary.

Where? The location of the Forum within the United Nations was considered by speakers as appropriate.

Areas of Concern and Areas for Reflection

Who? There was less clarity in the discussion about who should be involved, on all sides of this tripartite coalition. The notion of a tripartite structure which involves a carefully balanced participation by the three broad groups involved (Member States, UN agencies, and Religious agencies and NGOs) seemed sound, sensible, and generally workable. However, there remain some issues on who should be involved at various levels. At one level the hope was expressed that a wider range of institutions, especially member states, could become involved. Yet there was also recognition that these are wide universes and engaging all who might have interest in this wide forum poses practical challenges.

Several interventions focused on the important roles of women and youth in bridging divides among the tripartite partners, but there was less sense of how this could be achieved and this remains an area for future attention and action.

How? Many questions were raised as to how the Tripartite Forum could and should function at various levels, from its overall structure to the nature of discussions and debates. The pattern that was followed today, of rotating interventions by representatives of member states, UN agencies, and Religious NGOs, assured a good balance and many voices were heard, but it did not encourage

active interaction and dialogue. Different formats including smaller issue focused discussions suggested by various speakers. The importance of action at the grass roots as well as at a global level was stressed many times so the issue is how to pursue these different strands and bring them together. There was a good suggestion to pursue a suggestion to organize hearings on international cooperation within the framework of the General Assembly. Follow up in conjunction of the report on the Alliance of Civilizations commission could be envisaged.

There was a widespread concern that the focus of the Forum should be on action, not on words and speeches, but much less clarity on what that might involve. I was personally somewhat concerned about the expression of some skepticism about the merits of dialogue, as true dialogue that seeks understanding and transformation would seem a critical part of this process. But the desire to promote effective action echoed strongly and was welcomed by us all. The importance of many and creative partnerships was widely highlighted but again it was somewhat less clear how the Forum can and should work to promote them. The importance of communication was well stressed and is an area where further discussion and action was recommended.

What? Many posed questions about the focus of issues that the Tripartite Forum should address. The questions of peace were central to the conception of the Forum and remain at its heart, but the next question is how this group can contribute to peace-making and peace building at a practical level. Likewise there was a sense that the intersections of the various agendas present is critical for attainment of the MDGs but it was less clear exactly how this might be achieved. There were glimmers of practical ideas and themes in both areas, notably in a constant recurring focus on education. But a critical next stage will evidently involve the development of agendas where this Forum is particularly well positioned to bring its voice and advance dialogue.

The Path Forward

The organizers have committed themselves to take stock of today's discussion and to report back to those who attended today's conference.